

Preface

We have written this book to bring a highly useful model to school leaders at the building, district, and state levels. Use of the model of reasoned action (MORA) can enhance decision making, problem solving, and planning. The solving of school problems and the making of policy decisions often require that we anticipate how people will feel about an issue or how they will behave. Often, we want to go further and *influence* how people feel or behave, and the MORA described in this book makes this possible.

This book enables readers to understand how people form attitudes and make decisions about performing—or not performing—a wide variety of future behaviors. These behaviors include voters supporting a school bond issue, teachers integrating technology into their instruction, students staying in school to graduate, and parents monitoring their children's homework. Understanding *why* people feel the way they do about a given issue (e.g., a closed high school campus at lunchtime) can be useful in the making of school policy.

The model of reasoned action (MORA) is based on the assumptions that most people are usually rational, and that they use the information they have in making decisions. People make decisions about their future behavior based on information about the likely consequences of performing the behavior. The model is not intended to explain totally spontaneous, unplanned, or irrational behavior. Many of the more important behaviors, however—the ones that are critical to school success—are planned, however casually, and can be understood by using the MORA.

THE ORIGINS OF THE MODEL OF REASONED ACTION (MORA)

Social psychologists have investigated the concept of attitude and its relationship to behavior since at least the 1930s. Martin Fishbein (e.g., 1963, 1967) and his colleague (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) clarified and integrated this work, producing the MORA described in this book. This model has been used since the 1960s to study such diverse behaviors as smoking cigarettes (e.g., Fishbein, 1982), voting in an election (e.g., Shepard, 1987), and using public transportation (e.g., Bamberg & Schmidt, 2001, 2003). The model has been called by a variety of names ("Fishbein's model," "a theory of reasoned action," and "the theory of planned behavior").

ORIGINS OF THIS BOOK

The MORA is typically taught only in graduate courses in social psychology. Only in the past decade or so has it begun to be applied to studies of educational decision making (e.g., Pryor, 1990; Thornburg & Pryor, 1998; Ballone & Czerniak, 2001; Kim, 2003). For all practical purposes, therefore, until this book, the MORA was not readily available to school leaders.

Ever since I (Brandt W. Pryor) studied with Dr. Fishbein and two of his postdoctoral fellows, I have been excited about the MORA and eager to share it with others. After a colleague asked if I had written anything on how to apply the MORA, I decided to test interest in it among educators. I developed the workshop *Have You Got "Attitude"?: Measuring, Understanding, and Changing Attitude and Behavior*. The interest shown at the first workshop presentation prompted presentations at three other state and regional meetings and at three national meetings since 1998. That workshop laid the foundation for this volume.

Based on my (Caroline R. Pryor) 25 years of experience in schools, I saw the utility the MORA has for school leaders and

asked the first author to lecture to my classes on the model. After seeing the interest with which school leaders in my classes have received it, I suggested focusing this book on them.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT, AND WHAT IT IS

This book is *not* a laundry list of answers to the problems school leaders face every day. Books of that type become outdated very quickly, and more important, “all-purpose” solutions really do not exist. A solution that works with one district, school, or classroom will not necessarily work in all others. This book is *also* not a list of lessons drawn from the experience of a long-practiced administrator. Such volumes (e.g., Barth, 2003) can be quite helpful but are necessarily limited by the author’s experiences, perspectives, and limitations.

This book *is* an introduction, and a guide, to a problem-solving technique that can be applied in *many* settings, to solve *specific* problems. This technique draws on theoretical developments and has had nearly four decades of testing and refinement by hundreds of scholars.

This book will help you learn how to understand the attitudes other people form and how to influence them in the desired direction. You might want to know why teachers oppose a particular instructional innovation or why community members support a new campus policy.

Perhaps even more important, this book will show you how to understand the decisions people make to perform—or not perform—certain behaviors, and how to influence those behavioral decisions in the desired direction. This technique for understanding attitudes and behaviors will prove an invaluable tool in the school leader’s tool kit.

USE OF THIS BOOK

The book presents this widely tested model in an easy-to-read format. Readers are challenged to apply what they learn as

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they progress through the book. Planning forms that illustrate the key steps in applying the MORA offer a useful guide, and a variety of other useful materials are found in the Resources section.

Individual readers will benefit from reading this book. As is true of most books, it is likely to be even more beneficial when read in an independent study group, a professional development program, or a graduate course. (Instructors may contact the first author for a course syllabus.) Readers need not be concerned about their level of statistical knowledge as only two analytic statistics are required, and they are described in everyday language. Regardless of your context for reading the book, you will benefit from keeping in mind a situation in which you would like to understand people's attitudes or behavioral intentions. As you read each chapter of the book, think about how you will apply it to your situation.

There isn't always the time *or* the need to *fully* apply the MORA in every situation. For the most important opportunities or problems, however, when you *must* know how best to influence the attitudes or behaviors of others, this book will tell you how. In less critical situations, the understanding of attitudes and behaviors you gain from this book will be useful.

Regardless, this is a tool you can use the rest of your working life. Start now with this practical book, and make a positive difference in attitude in your school or district!